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Security Aid Ouster Postponed by Rusk

BY WILLARD EDWARDS

[Chicago Tribune Press Service]

Washington, Oct. 23 (AP)

state department today indefinitely postponed the scheduled dismissal of Otto F. Otepka, chief of the security evaluation division, bureau of security and consular affairs.

Otepka, 48, a veteran of 27 years in government service, was to have been fired today on charges that he provided classified information to Senate investigators of loose security procedures in the state department.

Rusk Served Notice

The state department's retreat came after Secretary of State Dean Rusk appeared at a closed session of the Senate internal security subcommittee last Monday.

Rusk was served with a notice by Sen. Thomas J. Dodd [D., Conn.], acting chairman, that Otepka's discharge would be regarded by the subcommittee as a hostile action, to be followed by an immediate and public expose of conditions described as "dismaying" by several senators.

In giving Otepka a stay, the department informed him that "a decision has been deferred for a few days." He will remain in active duty status at his present salary, \$16,900, the notice said, pending final departmental action, "including departmental review of his appeal from any adverse decision." This process, it was noted, could take weeks or months.

Action Called Harassment

A subcommittee member said he was confident that the eventual decision would not be adverse. The charges will be dropped, this senator predicted, altho Otepka could be given a reprimand for too much zeal in cooperating with a Senate inquiry.

When the charges were filed against Otepka on Sept. 23, giving him notice of dismissal in 30 days, Chairman James O. Eastland [D., Miss.] of the Senate judiciary committee labeled the action "harassment" and "an attempt to remove a permanent employee for exercising



Otto F. Otepka

his constitutional right to give information to Congress.

Dodd had said that discharge of Otepka would be "a great tragedy." He asserted that the state department seemed more interested in prosecuting employees who wanted to clean up the department than in employees accused of practices injurious to national security.

Rusk to Set Rules

The subcommittee plans to go ahead with its closed door sessions, summoning 25 state department witnesses who were forbidden last Aug. 15 to testify. Rusk lifted this ban Monday, after his session with the subcommittee, but stipulated that the witnesses should be guided by regulations drafted by him. The subcommittee is awaiting this set of ground rules to determine if further obstacles are to be imposed to its investigation.

The discharge of Otepka, Rusk was told, would be considered by the subcommittee as "tantamount to a continuing prohibition on collaboration with the Senate subcommittee by state department employees."

Otepka has denied that he acted improperly in any sense and rejected an allegation that he had mutilated classified documents. He implied in his formal reply that evidence had been planted in his burn bag, a receptacle for papers scheduled for destruction. He has employed an attorney, Roger Robb, and announced he will fight to the bitter end.

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